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FM AMCONSUL PESHAWAR
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8045
INFO RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD IMMEDIATE 4818
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE IMMEDIATE 1922
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI IMMEDIATE 1930
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL IMMEDIATE 1556
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI IMMEDIATE 1192
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA IMMEDIATE 0774
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE 0958
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE IMMEDIATE 0823
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO IMMEDIATE 0774
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA IMMEDIATE 0868
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/CDR USSOCOM MACDILL AFB FL
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 PESHAWAR 000125

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 6/10/2019

TAGS: [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [ABLD](#) [MOPS](#) [PK](#)

SUBJECT: EXPLOSION AT PESHAWAR'S PEARL CONTINENTAL HOTEL

CLASSIFIED BY: Lynne Tracy, Principal Officer, U.S. Consulate
Peshawar, Department of State.

REASON: 1.4 (d)

Summary

1. (C) Amid strong condemnation from senior Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) officials, local authorities are sifting through the debris of Peshawar's Pearl Continental (PC) Hotel in the wake of a June 10 explosion that left at least 15 dead and over 50 injured. Contrary to initial reports of an attack on security personnel at entrance, local security camera footage indicates the vehicle reportedly carrying 500 kg of explosives was able enter the hotel grounds unimpeded. (Note: We assess the amount of explosives may have been substantially less than the 500 kg estimate.) The detonation on the western side of the hotel left a crater 6 feet deep and 15 feet wide. President Zardari called the Ambassador to express concern about the status of American personnel in Peshawar.

2. (C) The Consulate will remain open but is limiting its movements to essential business through June 11 as post assesses the attack and local security environment. While there have been no claims of responsibility, the attack will almost certainly increase concerns about the vulnerability of nearby government facilities to attack. Post's Regional Security Office (RSO) was able to gain access to the site and has conducted an initial damage survey (to be transmitted separately). Any conclusions about the impact on our plans to acquire the PC property for a future Consulate site would be premature at this stage. End Summary.

Explosion at the PC Hotel

3. (U) At approximately 2230 (local), a vehicle packed with explosives detonated in the parking lot located on the west side of the PC Hotel. The blast which shook the windows of the Consulate compound approximately 2 km east of the hotel was heard across the city. Initial pictures show a collapse of some of the hotel's exterior western wall adjacent to the blast.

4. (C) Contrary to initial reports of a gun battle at the PC's entrance on Khyber Road, local television is running footage from the hotel's security camera that show what appears to be a

lead vehicle (sedan) followed by a small truck entering without challenge or screening. Guards at the entrance appear to be running away as the vehicles turn onto the PC's driveway. Post understands that some of the PC guards have been arrested.

Casualties

15. (SBU) According to local authorities, the attack left at least 15 dead and over 50 injured. (Note: There are conflicting estimates being offered, ranging from 15 to 20. This is not unusual given the chaos surrounding scene, and local tradition of burying bodies quickly after death, making accuracy in mass casualty attacks in Pakistan difficult.) Most of the casualties were Pakistani nationals, including the PC General Manager who was recently posted to Peshawar. Two NWFP politicians were injured in the attack. UN contacts report that one UNHCR employee (Serbian, initially reported as "Russian") and one UNICEF employee (Filipino) were killed and one WFP employee (United Kingdom) was seriously wounded. Three other UN staff sustained minor injuries. There have been no reports of American casualties. No Consulate personnel were at the PC at the time of the explosion. (Note: Post policy prohibits overnight stays at the PC, but has permitted since February some tightly controlled limited use of the hotel.)

Post-Blast Assistance

16. (C) Host government officials have accepted Consulate's offer of post-blast investigation assistance. An FBI post-blast investigation team out of Islamabad will travel to Peshawar to provide immediate investigative assistance. Local authorities have accepted additional jersey barriers from the Consulate. However, it is unclear whether the barriers will be properly

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positioned in a manner that enhances security. Most local jersey barrier arrangements remain vulnerable to being pushed aside by larger vehicles because the barriers are not well-anchored.

Limiting Movements

17. (SBU) The Consulate will remain open, but post is limiting its movements to essential business only through June 11 to assess the attack and local security environment. Embassy Islamabad released a warden notice to this effect on June 10. Embassy UN contacts report that all UN personnel are being pulled back to Islamabad while the UN assesses its Peshawar footprint.

Comment

18. (S/NF) While there have been no claims of responsibility, militants have been promising retaliation for operations in Swat. Key local officials view Baitullah Mehsud as the likely author. The casualty count of the PC attack is not as high as other bombings in Peshawar and elsewhere in the NWFP. A December 2008 suicide attack in Peshawar's Old City left over 50 dead. However, the symbolic value of hitting such a high profile target so close to Peshawar's relatively well-guarded cantonment area of government and military offices is substantial. The NWFP Provincial Assembly and Peshawar's judicial complex are directly across the street from the PC. The 11th Corps Commander's residence and grounds are directly adjacent to the western side of the PC where the explosion took place. Militant penetration with such a substantial load of explosives so close to these facilities will almost certainly increase concerns about the cantonment's vulnerability to attack. Those concerns will be only further reinforced by the apparent weaknesses in security at the PC.

TRACY